

# So long, copper! Penny-ante zinc is taking over

By Roger Boye

**A**s expected, Uncle Sam will discontinue production of copper cents by Oct. 30, ending a coinage tradition that began when Abraham Lincoln was president.

"Our conversion to making zinc cents is right on schedule," a United States Mint administrator said last week. "Once completed, we don't foresee going back to making copper cents."

Government factories in West Point, N.Y., and San Francisco started churning out the new copper-coated zinc pennies months ago, and many of those coins are already in circulation. But bureaucrats delayed in making a change at the nation's two largest mints until they obtained an ample supply of zinc "blanks" needed to create the new coins, said John Doom of the mint's Washington staff.

So far this year, the Philadelphia and Denver Mints have produced 1982-dated Lincoln cents out of the traditional alloy of 95 percent copper and 5 percent zinc.

Except for the 1943 wartime cents, all pennies produced for circulation since 1864 have contained 95 percent copper. Thanks to the thin copper plating, the new cents look like their copper cousins even though they contain at least 97.5 percent zinc.

The Treasury Department expects to save millions of dollars in production costs annually because zinc is cheaper than copper.

● Several congressmen want the federal government to resurrect production of gold coins in 1984 as a step toward restoring the gold standard.

Analysts say the proposal has almost no chance of becoming law, at least this year. Nonetheless, several experts supported the concept of gold coinage during hearings late last month before a House subcommittee in Washington.

The proposed legislation in Congress—introduced by Rep. Ron Paul [R., Tex.] and 10 cosponsors—would require the government to make an "American Eagle" 1-ounce gold coin starting in 1984, as well as three fractional gold coins starting the following year.